



NEWS RELEASE²

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While people living close to Jersey City chromium contaminated lots are more likely to show detectable chromium levels in their urine than those living farther away, medical evaluations did not show illnesses linked with chromium in any of the people tested, the N.J. Department of Health has determined.

Health Commissioner Molly Joel Coye today announced results of independent medical evaluations on 165 students and adults from the Whitney Young Jr. School in Jersey City.

The majority of the children and school staff tested showed no detectable levels of chromium. Urine, skin, nose and throat tests were conducted on the students and staff, and a dermatologist and a nose and throat specialist conducted more extensive exams on 20 students and six adults. Everyone undergoing the initial testing has already received an individual report on results, and those referred to specialists will be receiving reports shortly.

No illnesses were detected that could be linked with chromium exposure in any of the 165 people examined, Dr. Coye said.

However, laboratory tests did show that people living closest to chromium sites were most likely to have detectable levels of chromium. Fifty-four percent of children who lived on the same block as a chromium site had measurable levels of chromium, compared to 39 percent of those living on nearby blocks and 9 percent of those living outside the immediate vicinity of the contaminated lots.

"The laboratory tests confirm that the chromium exposure we are measuring is related to the chromium-contaminated lots, rather than the Whitney Young Jr. School," Dr. Coye pointed out. "We are relieved that the physicians did not find any symptoms related to chromium exposure," she added.

Deputy Health Commissioner Thomas Burke said the laboratory tests underscore the need to remove sources of exposure in the community and they support action by the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection to pave or otherwise cover all chromium-contaminated sites as quickly as possible.

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Dr. Coyle added that chromium quickly flushes from the body once exposure to the source is eliminated.

To confirm that chromium levels have been reduced once the chromium lots have been covered, the health commissioner recommended new urine tests for all those with measurable levels of chromium at that time.

Late in the last school year, the Whitney Young Jr. School was closed by local officials concerned that chromium contamination might be a health hazard to the students and school staff. To determine if chromium was in fact present in the school and if it was posing a health risk, the Department of Health conducted screening tests at the school and medical evaluations on many of its occupants.

*Results of air, soil, dust and crystal tests at the school did not show widespread chromium contamination inside the school. The tests did indicate that people were tracking chromium particles into the school from outside and that the ventilation system was collecting chromium at its intake vents.

The medical evaluations support the determination that the chromium problem exists outside the school. While the health department continues to recommend clean-up of the school to remove any chromium that might have collected there, Dr. Coyle emphasized the importance of containing the contamination at the lots.

In the medical evaluations, 35 students and 11 adults showed levels of chromium that could be measured. Those measurements ranged between 0.3, the lowest detectable level, and 2.8 micrograms per liter.

In comparison, levels as high as 41 micrograms per liter have been found in industry workers outside of the United States.

As part of the medical evaluations, five of the 97 students were referred to a dermatologist and three were referred to a nose and throat specialist. Of 68 adults examined, 15 were referred to a dermatologist and three were referred to a nose and throat specialist.

Another 10 students and 13 adults were referred to personal physicians after evidence of conditions unrelated to chromium exposure, such as sickle cell anemia or diabetes, were found.

Among the 65 adults who were tested, 16 percent had detectable levels of chromium in the urine. However, none of the adults living in the immediate vicinity of the contaminated lots had detectable levels of urine chromium.

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